

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 189

SO 009 906

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TITLE Teaching Psychology in the Secondary Schools: A Historical Background.
PUB DATE 3 Sep 76
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (84th, Washington, D.C., September 3-7, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Course Descriptions; *Educational History; *Educational Trends; *High School Curriculum; *Instructional Improvement; *Psychology; Secondary Education; Student Attitudes; Surveys; Teacher Qualifications; Textbooks

ABSTRACT

A history of psychology teaching in U.S. secondary schools from 1831 to 1976 is presented. The first section discusses changes in course content from the late 19th century, when psychology was part of the elementary teacher education program, to the present, when psychology is most often offered as a personal adjustment course. Section two focuses on textbooks which have been used to teach psychology related subjects since 1831. Recent surveys indicate that teachers favor basic textbooks, but that various materials are also used in some courses in lieu of a textbook. The third section indicates that psychology teachers receive more university training and participate more in psychology workshops and summer institutes than previously. Also, they generally teach social science courses in addition to psychology. The ever increasing number of students enrolled in high school psychology courses is discussed in section four, followed by a brief summary which reports that the teaching of psychology on the high school level is becoming more common, teacher preparation is improving, student enrollment is increasing, a variety of teaching material is becoming available, and psychologists are becoming interested in this area of instruction. References are included in the document. (Author/DB)

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AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Washington, D.C., Friday morning, September 3, 1976, 9:00 - 9:50.
The Forum, Shoreham Americana

MAR 28 1977

Division 2, Symposium: Teaching High School Psychology.

TEACHING PSYCHOLOGY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A HISTORICAL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

BACKGROUND

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My personal interest in and working for the teaching of psychology at the high school level dates back to the early 1930's. Although that may seem to go far back in history, there is evidence that the teaching of psychology at the secondary school level dates back a hundred years farther.

I shall refer to the early literature and also to more recent studies such as those reported by Epley, Matiya, Stahl and Casteel, Snellgrove, Zunino, Kasschau and Wertheimer, and others, but I shall not bother you with detailed references. If any of you have questions about studies mentioned, I shall be glad to give you the references at the close of this session.

Within the past quarter century there has been a marked increase in the number of teachers of psychology in the United States, from about a thousand in 1950 to more than 10,000 by 1974. (2, page 11)

A 1951 report indicated that psychology was taught in the high schools of 34 states, today it is taught in the high schools of all 50 states. (2) Twenty-five years ago perhaps one high school in ten offered a course in psychology, today the figure is close to one in four or five high schools. (15, page 10)

APA has become quite interested in high school psychology. (15, page 1) As far back as 1937 there was a committee report on secondary school psychology. (26) Division 2 began publishing a number of articles on the

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subject in its Newsletter in 1964. (15, page 6) Periodically has been issued monthly during the academic year since January 1971, ~~(1971)~~ although reports indicate that only a third to a half of high school teachers receive it. (24)

I am sure that our primary concern at this symposium is with the teaching of psychology in American high schools, but a brief look abroad may give us some perspective. A 1969 article indicated that about a fourth of the secondary schools in England, Wales, and Scotland taught some form of psychology, the preference being for the human relations approach rather than the scientific approach. (27) The same report indicated that the teachers were concerned about their lack of training and the lack of suitable textbooks, but they did have an organization of their own.

In 1972 the U.S. Registry of Junior and Senior High School Social Science Personnel had the names and addresses of precollege psychology teachers in 18 foreign countries. We know that psychology is taught in the secondary schools of such widely separated countries as Canada, Mexico, Peru, Phillipines, Taipei, Costa-Rica, Columbia, Australia, and Sweden. (23) In 1972 a doctoral candidate in West Germany reported that psychology had just been introduced as a school subject of the last grades of high school. (11) At the 1972 meetings of the International Congress of Psychology meetings in Tokyo, I contacted ten Japanese psychologists and asked whether psychology was taught below the college level in Japan. They did not know of the teaching of psychology in any secondary schools, but said that some material of a psychological nature was presented as units in such courses as ethics and social studies.

Hopefully school administrators in the United States today have changed from some of their number who in the early 1950's hesitated to introduce psychology in their high schools because of the fear that such

courses would make their students morbidly introspective, would place too much stress on abnormal sex manifestations, or would be too difficult for students of high school age.¹³ In those same years some administrators suggested that in the day of science there was so much demand for science courses that there was no room for psychology.

With this brief view of psychology at the secondary level, I shall now turn to such specific areas as course content, textbooks, teachers, and students.

The Course

During the late years of the 19th and early years of the 20th century, psychology was offered in some states, at least in Iowa, as a "professional" course for students who planned to teach in elementary schools after high school graduation.⁸ With this "professional" training in psychology, the high school graduate needed only attend a normal school for one semester or one summer in order to secure a license to teach.

A survey in 1956 indicated that in approximately two-thirds of the high schools offering psychology, it was a one-semester course, and a two-semester course in the other third.¹⁰ A 1973 report indicated that the psychology course was one semester in length in 74 percent of the schools, and two semesters in length in 26 percent of the schools.²⁴ Another survey for the school year which has just past indicated that 81 teachers reported an 18 weeks course whereas only six teachers reported a 36 weeks course.¹²

A 1967 report indicated that only about two percent of the high schools offering psychology did so for students not planning to attend college, but 20 percent offered the course primarily for students planning to attend college.⁹ A few schools offered two courses in psychology, one for college-bound students and one for students not

planning to attend college. Courses for the latter group were often given under some such title as "Human Relationships."

Several surveys have indicated that most teachers, for example 83 percent in one survey, favor a personal adjustment approach to their course rather than a discipline oriented course.¹⁴ Such areas of psychology as physiological, sensation and perception, and statistics are usually ranked near the bottom of the list of topics taught. In fact, I know of no studies, past or present, that do not place statistics at the bottom of the list.

Textbooks

In 1831 there was published a two-volume work, Elements of Mental Philosophy, which was evidently used in some secondary schools as a textbook. In 1840 it was abridged to a one-volume book for definite use in academies and high schools. In the same year a teacher in the Geneva Female Seminary published a book based on her lectures, Elements of the Philosophy of Mind Applied to the Development of Thought and Feelings.²¹ By 1857 St. Louis offered a high school course in Mental Philosophy which evidently was somewhat of a psychology course, but there seems to be no record of the textbook used.

The first high school textbook containing the word "psychology" in the title appeared in 1889. In that year a Professor of Mental and Moral Science at the Michigan State Normal School published a textbook with the impressive title, Elementary Psychology, or the First Principles of Mental and Moral Science for High, Normal, and Other Secondary Schools, and for Private Reading.¹⁶ In the same year the principal of Wesleyan Academy at Wilbraham, Massachusetts, published Rudimentary Psychology for Schools and Colleges which was "designed for students in academies,

high schools, and collegiate institutions." The author described his book as "This is an attempt to present in a clear and easily apprehensible form, with due regard both to scientific requirements and to the consensus of the ~~be~~^{best} and most recent authorities, the main facts of psychology."

Prior to 1890 there were seven books intended for use in high schools although in two cases the books were intended for the teacher rather than the pupils.¹⁶

In 1956 an analysis was made of seven current textbooks considered by their publishers to have been written for high school courses in psychology.⁴ They differed greatly in their treatment of the various areas of psychology. For example, one book devoted one percent of its **pages** to biological foundations of behavior, another 22 percent to the same topic. The proportion of pages devoted to personality ranged from 15 to 45 percent, learning ranged from 3 to 29 percent, mental hygiene from 11 to 28 percent, and social psychology from zero to 15 percent. Evidently there were even fewer guidelines for authors than there are today.

Some teachers use various materials in their courses but do not have a basic textbook. However, a 1973 report from Florida listed four state adopted textbooks. A report for Iowa in the 1975-76 academic year listed seven textbooks as being used, but added, "A great variety of other texts or workbooks were also used by only a few psychology teachers."¹²

Teachers

There was a time when evidently the course in psychology was assigned to whatever teacher had a vacant period at the right time. All teachers had probably had a course or two in educational psychology as part of their teacher training and so must be qualified to teach psychology at the high school level. Fortunately, today the picture is much brighter.

A 1952 report indicated that 99 percent of teachers of psychology held a bachelor's degree and that 60 to 75 percent held a master's degree, with a few holding doctoral degrees.³ This does not say that the teachers were psychology majors or minors.²⁵ A 1960 report indicated a mean training in psychology of 15 to 25 semester hours, probably nearer 15, but if educational psychology courses were not counted the figure dropped to just over eight semester hours in psychology, ~~at least 10~~¹⁰ In 1970 a review of the literature for several studies gave a mean of 13.8 hours undergraduate semester hours in psychology and 19.8 graduate hours.²⁰

More recent studies have indicated such data as the following: ~~In~~^{In} Ohio in 1971, 75 percent of the teachers had less than 20 semester hours of psychology and approximately 90 percent had fewer than 30 semester hours training in psychology.²² In Florida in 1973 the number of semester hours in psychology or educational psychology ranged from zero to 75, with a mean of 25.1 hours.²⁵ Another 1973 report gave the statement that 20 percent of teachers had majored in psychology as undergraduates and that 30 percent taught psychology full time.²⁴ A 1976 report indicated that 20 percent of 85 teachers had a major or minor in psychology for the bachelor's degree and 45 percent had a major or minor in psychology for the master's degree.¹⁷ Another 1976 report indicated that less than half of the teachers of psychology obtained their highest degree in the areas of psychology or counseling.¹² Today we are having more and more workshops and summer institutes for teachers.

I have the impression that the number of teachers devoting full time to the teaching of psychology is increasing. However, a 1976 study in Iowa indicated that most teachers taught courses in addition to psychology, especially sociology, government, and history. Many also

did coaching or guidance counseling.¹²

Students

Studies related to the teaching of psychology at the high school level have tended to concentrate on the subject matter and the training of teachers, but we do have some material on the students taking psychology in high school.

Some have feared that psychology might be a dumping ground for poor students, but there is some evidence to the contrary. Many high school psychology students plan to and do go on to college. A 1952 report from California revealed that almost 10 percent of students enrolled in a general course in psychology in a state teacher's college had had a course in psychology in high school.¹ Again in 1957 a survey reported that about one student out of ten taking psychology in 13 universities had had some instruction in psychology in high school.⁵ When these university students were asked if their high school courses had given them the correct impression of psychology as they had come to know it in their university courses, 55 percent replied in the affirmative, 49 percent expressed the opinion that their high school courses had been of assistance to them in their university courses.⁶ The students who had taken a two-semester course in high school were more likely to believe that they had been assisted than did those who had taken only a one-semester course in high school.

A 1958 report indicated that two-thirds of students taking psychology in high school were from the upper halves of their classes in academic standing. Only 13 percent were from the lowest fourth of their high school class in terms of academic standing. Also, this report indicated that slightly over half of the students taking psychology in high school

planned to enter college.⁷

It is now estimated that between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of a million students are enrolled in precollege psychology courses. This is in contrast to only 150,000 such students some 12 years ago (somewhat over 600,000 in 1972-73).¹⁸

The teaching of psychology at the high school level is becoming more and more common, teacher preparation is improving, students like the course as is indicated by increasing enrollments, a great variety of teaching material is becoming available, and psychologists are becoming interested in this area of instruction. The future seems bright.

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